

VZCZCXYZ0022
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHDM #5361/01 3381429
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 041429Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2557
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 6416
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4209
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 2806
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7389
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1421
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4773
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 0988
RHMFIS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCPA//
INFO RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 7123

UNCLAS DAMASCUS 005361

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, DBENZE AND AFERNANDEZ,
IIP/G/NEA-SA RWINCHESTER
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KMDR PREL KPAO OPRC SY

SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Syria/Palestine, Syria/Italy,
Lebanon, Syria/Finland, Iraq (12/4)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on Dec. 4 reported the visit to Damascus by Palestinian PM Ismail Hanieh and his meeting with PM Ottri on Dec. 3, focusing on bilateral relations and regional developments.

Papers also reported FM Mouallem's meeting on Sunday with Mr. Chizari Maria Raghlini, Director General of the Directorate for the Mediterranean and the Middle East of the Italian Foreign Ministry. Talks during the meeting dealt with developments in the region, including Iraq, Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territories.

On the Lebanese front, Syrian commentators expressed support for the demands of "the overwhelming majority" of the Lebanese people, as expressed in the Beirut demonstrations, and they rejected the accusation that Syria interferes in Lebanese domestic affairs.

Papers cited a meeting in Helsinki between Dr. Mohammad Habash, member of the Syrian Parliament, and Cibu Risanin, Archbishop of Finland, who condemned the latest Israeli aggression against Lebanon, describing it as an aggression against spiritual values. The Archbishop of Finland also pointed out his people's anger over Israel's aggression against the headquarters of the Finnish peacekeeping battalion, stressing that Syria represents a brilliant example of coexistence, and the place where religious tolerance reflects the country's original human civilization.

End of summary.

¶2. Selected Headlines:

"PM Ottri reviews regional developments and bilateral relations with Palestinian PM Ismail Hanieh, underscoring the importance of Palestinian unity to foil Israeli schemes" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/4)

"FM Mouallem reviews the situation in the region with Mr. Chizari Maria Raghlini, Director General of the Directorate for Mediterranean and Middle East of the Italian Foreign Ministry" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 12/4)

"Israel is worried about al-Saniora government. Franjeh and

Arslan: Syria protected Lebanon and we are proud to have relations with her. Al-Saniora government turns the security forces into armed Militia. A member of the opposition is killed by a government security element. The February 14 team obtains Israeli weapons" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 12/4)

"Speaker of the People's Assembly Mahmoud Abrash discusses means of boosting bilateral parliamentarian relations, with Nicholas Tolayev, Member of the Russian Federal Committee for Defense and Security. Tolayev: Moscow is keen to support Syria's positions" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 12/4)

"Israel shells Beit Lahia, paving the way for more violations of the cease-fire: Self-restraint is difficult. French presidential candidate Segolene Royale from Gaza: Palestinians have the right to an independent state and to receive aid" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/4)

"President Talabani rejects an international conference on Iraq. Three US soldiers killed in Baghdad and al-Anbar. An assault against a British patrol in Basra" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/4)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Disgrace"

Abd-al-Fattah al-Awad, Chief Editor of government-owned Al-Thawra, commented (12/4): "What is happening in Lebanon is a correction of a wrong situation. It is a democratic expression of opinion that is clearly and loudly asking Al-Saniora and his team to pack their

things and leave the government....

"Al-Saniora's team receives support from Olmert, Bush, Rice, and always Bolton.... This being the case, the division in Lebanon is between a group that has agreed to support the person who is supported by Olmert, and a group -- which includes most of the Lebanese -- that prevailed over Olmert and his war machine and recorded an epic in resistance....

"It is astonishing that Washington gives two contradictory descriptions to the same situation.... If people take to the streets to support a group that follows US policies, then this is a great democratic practice. If, on the other hand, people take to the same streets to oppose American policies and those who adopt them, then this is chaos and riots, or even a coup.... The United States supports a government against which people demonstrate in Lebanon while it opposes a government for which people demonstrate in Palestine....

"The team that has bet on the American plan in the region and planned all its steps on the assumption that the Americans would succeed, has not yet understood that the American banner of failure has been raised, declaring a humiliating loss. We do not know how they still rely on the illusion of foreign support when they see the squares of Beirut full of people demanding their departure....

"The sense of responsibility and logical human reaction make it unacceptable for a person to insist on staying while millions of people want him to go.... Above all, no one can reject the principle of a national unity government and participation in the Lebanese decision-making process.... A weak government at home seeking support from foreigners is the best recipe for the fall of the government."

"The Governing Team's Intentions"

Izz-al-Din al-Darwish, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (12/4): "The situation in Lebanon is a conflict between a

popular majority wanting Lebanon to be in control of its own affairs and a minority wanting to join the American-Israeli plan fully; between a majority comprising known and recognized nationalist forces wanting to serve the interests of all the Lebanese and concerned about Lebanon's Arabism and power, and a minority concerned about leadership, investments, selfish interests, and exposed suspicious connections....

"The opposition's peaceful and democratic activity is not expected to be easy. What the other team has shown so far, directly or through its allies, stresses that it is going ahead with its non-Lebanese agenda and that it is up to its ears in guilty connections and that it is ready to ignite sectarian strife at the end of the day. This is what the opposition has warned against, drawn attention to, and stressed that it will not be dragged into, no matter what the provocations, fabrications, and foreign interferences....

"The government team wants to take revenge against the opposition, particularly Hezbollah, after the resounding victory it achieved against Israeli in the July/August war.... However, the biggest guarantor of the opposition is that it has the support of the majority of the street and the determination to express its opinion peacefully."

"Small Players"

Ali Nasrallah, a columnist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (12/4): "The fact is that the pro-government forces in Lebanon are turning a blind eye to the demands of the huge popular protests in

Beirut. This proves that these forces are not in control of their decision and that domestic calculations are not on their agenda....

"Hatred has blinded the leaders of the February 14 team in Lebanon to the fact that Washington is no longer able to proceed with its policy and is now too weak to fulfill its promises to them.... These leaders will discover that they were nothing but cheap tools and small players in a big American project that has failed and died."

"Accusations for Consumption"

Ahmad Dawwa, a columnist in government-owned Al-Thawra, said (12/4): "American and French accusations that Syria interferes in Lebanon's affairs are meant to play down the mammoth demonstrations that the Lebanese opposition, in all its groups, organized to form a national unity government and draft a new electoral law. These accusations reflect the impotence and political bankruptcy of America's tools in Lebanon and, consequently, of what the Bush administration was planning against this country and the entire region....

"It is disgusting that the United States, which claims respect for democracy, supports an illegitimate and unconstitutional government, and more importantly, a government that is rejected by the majority of the Lebanese people.... What is more disgusting, however, is the doubt that is being cast about the motives of this Lebanese majority, which demonstrated peacefully and in a civilized manner, in favor of a group that reached the parliament through exploitation of blood, use of money, mortgage to foreigners, and involvement in the implementation of agendas that are hostile to Lebanon and all the Arab countries....

"Syria is honored by US accusation that it supports the overwhelming majority of the Lebanese people.... Syria has always supported the Lebanese people, in all their groups. It does not hide its support for Lebanese accord and for everything that leads to the restoration of security and stability and the return of power to the Lebanese...."

Corbin